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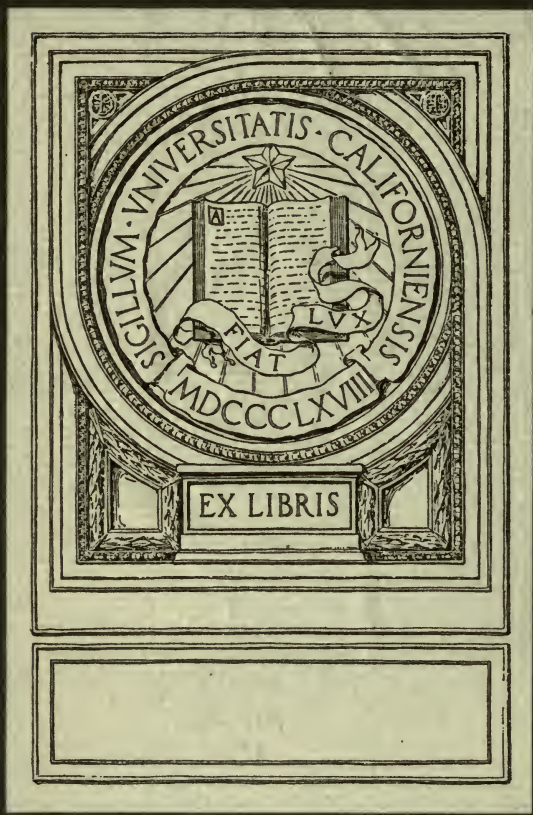
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NEUTRAL NATIONS AND THE WAR

BY

JAMES BRYCE

AUTHOR OF "THE AMERICAN COMMONWEALTH,"
"SOUTH AMERICA; OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS,"
ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1914

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NEUTRAL NATIONS AND THE WAR



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NEUTRAL NATIONS AND THE WAR

The present war has had some unexpected consequences. It has called the attention of the world outside Germany to some amazing doctrines proclaimed there, which strike at the root of all international morality, as well as of all international law, and which threaten a return to the primitive savagery when every tribe was wont to plunder and massacre its neighbors.

These doctrines may be found set forth in the widely circulated book of General von Bernhardt, entitled "Germany and the Next War," published in 1911, and professing to be mainly based on the teachings of the famous professor of history, Heinrich von Treitschke.

To readers in other countries—and, I trust, to most readers in Germany also—they will appear to be an outburst of militarism run mad, the product of a brain intoxicated by the love of war and by overweening national vanity.

They would have deserved little notice, much less refutation, but for one deplorable fact—viz., that action has recently been taken by the Government of a great nation (though, as we hope and trust, without the approval of that nation) which is consonant with them, and seems to imply a belief in their soundness.

This fact is the conduct of the German Imperial Government, in violating the neutrality of Belgium, which

Prussia, as well as Great Britain and France, had solemnly guaranteed by a treaty (made in 1839 and renewed in 1870); in invading Belgium when she refused to allow her armies to pass, although France, the other belligerent, had promised not to enter Belgium; and in treating the Belgian cities and people, against whom she had no cause of quarrel, with a harshness unprecedented in the history of modern European warfare.

What are these doctrines? I do not for a moment attribute them to the learned class in Germany, for whom I have profound respect, recognizing their immense services to science and learning; nor to the bulk of the civil administration, a body whose capacity and uprightness are known to all the world; and least of all to the German people generally. That the latter hold no such views appears from General Bernhardt's own words, for he repeatedly complains of, and deplores the pacific tendencies of, his fellow-countrymen.*

Nevertheless, the fact that the action referred to, which these doctrines seem to have prompted, and which cannot be justified except by them, has been actually taken, and has thus brought into this war Great Britain, whose interests and feelings made her desire peace, renders it proper to call attention to them and to all that they involve.

I have certainly no prejudice in the matter, for I have been one of those who for many years labored to promote good relations between Germans and Englishmen, peoples that ought to be friends, and that never before had been enemies, and I had hoped and believed till the

* See pp. 10-14 of English translation, and note the phrase, "Aspirations for peace seem to poison the soul of the German people."

beginning of August last that there would be no war, because Belgium neutrality would be respected.

Nor was it only for the sake of Britain and Germany that the English friends of peace sought to maintain good feeling. We had hoped, as some leading German statesmen had hoped, that a friendliness with Germany might enable Britain, with the coöperation of the United States (our closest friends), to mitigate the long antagonism of Germany and of France, with whom we were already on good terms, and to so improve their relations as to secure the general peace of Europe.

Into the causes which frustrated these efforts and so suddenly brought on this war I will not enter. Many others have dealt with them. Moreover, the facts, at least as we in England see and believe them, and as the documents seem to prove them to be, appear not to be known to the German people, and the motives of the chief actors are not yet fully ascertained.

One thing, however, I can confidently declare: It was neither commercial rivalry nor jealousy of German power that brought Britain into the field. Nor was there any hatred in the British people for the German people, nor any wish to break their power. The leading political thinkers and historians of England had given hearty sympathy to the efforts made by the German people (from 1815 to 1866 and 1870) to attain political unity, as they had sympathized with the parallel efforts of the Italians.

The two peoples, German and British, were of kindred race, and linked by many ties. In both countries there were doubtless some persons who desired war, and whose writings, apparently designed to provoke it, did much to misrepresent the general national sentiment. But these

persons were, as I believe, a small minority in both countries.

So far as Britain was concerned, it was the invasion of Belgium that arrested all efforts to avert war, and made the friends of peace themselves join in holding that the duty of fulfilling their treaty obligations to a weak State was paramount to every other consideration.

I return to the doctrines set forth by General von Bernhardi, and apparently accepted by the military caste to which he belongs. Briefly summed up, they are as follows. His own words are used, except when it becomes necessary to abridge a lengthened argument:—

War is in itself a good thing. "It is a biological necessity of the first importance" (p. 18).

"The inevitableness, the idealism, the blessing of war, as an indispensable and stimulating law of development, must be repeatedly emphasized" (p. 37).

"War is the greatest factor in the furtherance of culture and power."

"Efforts to secure peace are extraordinarily detrimental as soon as they influence politics" (p. 28).

"Fortunately these efforts can never attain their ultimate objects in a world bristling with arms, where a healthy egotism still directs the policy of most countries. 'God will see to it,' says Treitschke, 'that war always recurs as a drastic medicine for the human race'" (p. 36).

"Efforts directed toward the abolition of war are not only foolish, but absolutely immoral, and must be stigmatized as unworthy of the human race" (p. 34).

Courts of arbitration are pernicious delusions. "The whole idea represents a presumptuous encroachment on the natural laws of development which can only lead to

the most disastrous consequences for humanity generally" (p. 34).

"The maintenance of peace never can be or may be the goal of a policy" (p. 25).

"Efforts for peace would, if they attained their goal, lead to general degeneration, as happens everywhere in Nature, where the struggle for existence is eliminated" (p. 35).

Huge armaments are in themselves desirable. "They are the most necessary precondition of our national health" (p. 11).

"The end all and be all of a State is power, and he who is not man enough to look this truth in the face should not meddle with politics" (Quoted from Treitschke Politik) (p. 45).

"The State's highest moral duty is to increase its power" (pp. 45-6).

"The State is justified in making conquests whenever its own advantage seems to require additional territory" (p. 46).

"Self-preservation is the State's highest ideal," and justifies whatever action it may take, if that action be conducive to the end. Might is Right.

The State is the sole judge of the morality of its own action. It is, in fact, above morality, or, in other words, whatever is necessary is moral.

"Recognized rights (i.e., treaty rights) are never absolute rights; they are of human origin, and therefore imperfect and variable. There are conditions in which they do not correspond to the actual truth of things; in this case the infringement of the right appears morally justified" (p. 49). In fact, the State is a law to itself.

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“Weak nations have not the same right to live as the powerful and vigorous nation” (p. 34).

“Any action in favor of collective humanity outside the limits of the State and nationality is impossible” (p. 25).

These are startling propositions, though propounded as practically axiomatic. They are not new, for twenty-two centuries ago the Sophist Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* argued (Socrates refuting him) that Justice is nothing more than the advantage of the Stronger—*i.e.*, Might is Right.*

The most startling among them is the denial that there are any duties owed by the State to Humanity, except that of imposing its own superior civilization upon as large a part of humanity as possible, and the denial of the duty of observing treaties. Treaties are only so much paper.

To modern German writers the State is a much more tremendous entity than it is to Englishmen or Americans. It is a supreme power with a sort of mystic sanctity, a power conceived of, as it were, self-created, a force altogether distinct from and superior to, the persons who compose it.

But a State is, after all, only so many individuals organized under a Government. It is no wiser, no more righteous, than the human beings of whom it consists, and whom it sets up to govern it.

Has the State, then, no morality, no responsibility?

If it is right for persons united as citizens into a State to rob and murder for their collective advantage by their collective power, why should it be wicked for the citizens as individuals to do so? Does their moral responsi-

* Plato laid down that the end for which a State exists is Justice.

bility cease when and because they act together? Most legal systems hold that there are acts which one man may lawfully do which become unlawful if done by a number of men conspiring together. But now it would seem that what would be a crime in persons as individuals is high policy for those persons united in a State.

Is there no such thing as a common humanity? Are there no duties owed to it? Is there none of that "decent respect to the opinion of mankind" which the framers of the Declaration of Independence recognized; no sense that even the greatest States are amenable to the sentiment of the civilized world? *

Let us see how these doctrines affect the smaller and weaker States which have hitherto lived in comparative security beside the Great Powers.

They will be absolutely at the mercy of the stronger. Even if protected by treaties guaranteeing their neutrality and independence, they will not be safe, for treaty obligations are worthless "when they do not correspond to facts" —*i.e.*, when the strong Power finds that they stand in its way. Its interests are paramount.

(If a State has valuable minerals, as Sweden has iron, and Belgium coal, and Rumania oil, or if it has abundance of water power, like Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, or if it holds the mouth of a navigable river the upper course of which belongs to another nation, the great

* General Bernhardi refers approvingly to Machiavelli as "the first who declared that the keynote of every policy was the advancement of power." The Florentine, however, was not the preacher of doctrines with which he sought, like the General, to edify his contemporaries. He merely took his Italian world as he saw it. He did not attempt to buttress his doctrines by false philosophy, false history, and false science.

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State may conquer and annex that small State as soon as it finds that it needs the minerals, or the water power, or the river mouth.

It has the Power, and Power gives Right. The interests, the sentiments, the patriotism and love of independence of the small people go for nothing.)

Civilization has turned back upon itself, culture is to expand itself by barbaric force. Governments derive their authority not from the consent of the governed, but from the weapons of the conqueror.

Law and morality between nations have vanished. Herodotus tells us that the Scythians worshipped as God a naked sword. That is the deity to be installed in the place once held by the God of Christianity, the God of righteousness and mercy.

States, mostly despotic States, have sometimes applied parts of this system of doctrine, but none has proclaimed it. The Romans, conquerors of the world, were not a scrupulous people, but even they stopped short of these principles. Certainly they never set them up as an ideal. Neither did those magnificent Teutonic Emperors of the Middle Ages whose fame General von Bernhardi is fond of recalling. They did not enter Italy as conquerors, claiming her by the right of the strongest. They came on the faith of a legal title, which, however fantastic it may seem to us to-day, the Italians themselves—and, indeed, the whole of Latin Christendom—admitted. Dante, the greatest and most patriotic of Italians, welcomed the Emperor Henry the Seventh into Italy, and wrote a famous book to prove his claims, vindicating them on the ground that he, as the heir of Rome, stood for Law and Right and Peace. The noblest title which those Emper-

ors chose to bear was that of Emperor Pacificus. In the Middle Ages, when men were always fighting, they appreciated the blessings of war much less than does General Bernhardt, and they valued peace, not war, as a means to civilization and culture. They had not learned in the school of Treitschke that peace means decadence and war is the true civilizing influence.

The doctrines above stated are (as I have tried to point out) well calculated to alarm the small States which prize their liberty and their individuality, and have been thriving under the safeguard of treaties. But there are other considerations affecting those States which ought to appeal to men in all countries, to strong nations as well as weak nations.

The small States, whose absorption is now threatened, have been potent and useful—perhaps the most potent and useful—factors in the advance of civilization. It is in them and by them that most of what is most precious in religion, in philosophy, in literature, in science, and in art has been produced.

The first great thoughts that brought man into a true relation with God came from a tiny people, inhabiting a country smaller than Denmark. The religions of mighty Babylon and populous Egypt have vanished: the religion of Israel remains in its earlier as well as in that latter form which has overspread the world.

The Greeks were a small people, not united in one great State, but scattered over coasts and among hills in petty city communities, each with its own life, slender in numbers, but eager, versatile, intense. They gave us the richest, the most varied, and the most stimulating of all literatures.

When poetry and art reappeared, after the long night

of the Dark Ages, their most splendid blossoms flowered in the small republics of Italy.

In modern Europe what do we not owe to little Switzerland, lighting the torch of freedom 600 years ago, and keeping it alight through all the centuries when despotic monarchies held the rest of the European Continent; and what to free Holland, with her great men of learning and her painters surpassing those of all other countries save Italy?

So the small Scandinavian nations have given to the world famous men of science, from Linnæus downward, poets like Tegner and Björnson, dauntless explorers like Fridthiof Nansen. England had, in the age of Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton, a population little larger than that of Bulgaria to-day. The United States, in the days of Washington and Franklin and Jefferson and Hamilton and Marshall, counted fewer inhabitants than Denmark or Greece.

In the two most brilliant generations of German literature and thought, the age of Kant and Lessing and Goethe, of Hegel and Schiller and Fichte, there was no real German State at all, but a congeries of principalities and free cities, independent centers of intellectual life, in which letters and science produced a richer crop than the two succeeding generations have raised, just as Britain, also, with eight times the population of the year 1600, has had no more Shakespeares or Miltons.

No notion is more palpably contradicted by history than that relied on by the school to which General Bernhardt belongs, that "culture"—literary, scientific, and artistic—flourishes best in great military States. The decay of art and literature in the Roman World began just when Rome's military power had made that world

one great and ordered State. The opposite view would be much nearer the truth; though one must admit that no general theory regarding the relations of art and letters to governments and political conditions has ever yet been proved to be sound.*

The world is already too uniform, and is becoming more uniform every day. A few leading languages, a few forms of civilization, a few types of character, are spreading out from the seven or eight greatest States and extinguishing the weaker languages, forms, and types.

Although the great States are stronger and more populous, their peoples are not necessarily more gifted, and the extinction of the minor languages and types would be a misfortune for the world's future development.

We may not be able to arrest the forces which seem to be making for that extinction, but we certainly ought not to strengthen them. Rather we ought to maintain and defend the smaller States, and to favor the rise and growth of new peoples. Not merely because they were delivered from the tyranny of Sultans like Abdul Hamid did the intellect of Europe welcome the successively won liberations of Greece, Servia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro; it was also in the hope that those countries would in time develop out of their present crudeness new types of culture, new centers of productive intellectual life.

General Bernhardi invokes History, the ultimate

* General Bernhardi's knowledge of current history may be estimated by the fact that he assumes (1) that trade rivalry makes a war probable between Great Britain and the United States, (2) that he believes the Indian princes and peoples likely to revolt against Britain should she be involved in war, and (3) that he expects her self-governing Colonies to take such an opportunity of severing their connection with her!

court of appeal. He appeals to Cæsar. To Cæsar let him go. *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.**

History declares that no nation, however great, is entitled to try to impose its type of civilization on others. No race, not even the Teutonic or the Anglo-Saxon, is entitled to claim the leadership of humanity. Each people has in its time contributed something that was distinctively its own, and the world is far richer thereby than if any one race, however gifted, had established a permanent ascendancy.

✓ We of the Anglo-Saxon race do not claim for ourselves, any more than we admit in others, any right to dominate by force or to impose our own type of civilization on less powerful races. Perhaps we have not that assured conviction of its superiority which the school of General Bernhardt expresses for the Teutons of North Germany. We know how much we owe, even within our own islands, to the Celtic race. And though we must admit that peoples of Anglo-Saxon stock have, like others, made some mistakes and sometimes abused their strength, let it be remembered what have been the latest acts they have done abroad.

The United States have twice withdrawn their troops from Cuba, which they could easily have retained. They have resisted all temptations to annex any part of the territories of Mexico, in which the lives and property of their citizens were for three years in constant danger. So Britain also, six years ago, restored the amplest self-government to the two South African Republics (having already agreed to the maintenance on equal terms of the Dutch language), and the citizens of those Republics, which were in arms against her thirteen years ago; have

* World History is the World-tribunal.

now spontaneously come forward to support her by arms, under the gallant leader who then commanded the Boers. And I may add that one reason why the princes of India have rallied so promptly and heartily to Britain in this war is because for many years past we have avoided annexing the territories of those princes, allowing them to adopt heirs when successors of their own families failed, and leaving to them as much as possible of the ordinary functions of government.

It is only vulgar minds that mistake bigness for greatness, for greatness is of the Soul, not of the Body. In the judgment which history will hereafter pass upon the forty centuries of recorded progress toward civilization that now lie behind us, what are the tests it will apply to determine the true greatness of a people?

Not population, not territory, not wealth, not military power. Rather will history ask: What examples of lofty character and unselfish devotion to honor and duty has a people given? What has it done to increase the volume of knowledge? What thoughts and what ideals of permanent value and unexhausted fertility has it bequeathed to mankind? What works has it produced in poetry, music, and the other arts to be an un failing source of enjoyment to posterity?

The small peoples need not fear the application of such tests.

The world advances not, as the Bernhardt school suppose, only or even mainly by fighting. It advances mainly by thinking and by a process of reciprocal teaching and learning, by a continuous and unconscious coöperation of all its strongest and finest minds.

Each race has something to give, each something to

learn; and when their blood is blended the mixed stock may combine the gifts of both.

The most progressive races have been those who combined willingness to learn with a strength which enabled them to receive without loss to their own quality, retaining their primal vigor, but entering into the labors of others, as the Teutons who settled within the dominions of Rome profited by the lessons of the old civilization.

Let me disclaim once more before I close any intention to attribute to the German people the principles set forth by the school of Treitschke and Bernhardi, their hatred of peace and arbitration, their disregard of treaty obligations, their scorn for the weaker peoples.

We in England would feel an even deeper sadness than weighs upon us now if we could suppose that such principles had been embraced by a nation whose thinkers have done so much for human progress and who have produced so many shining examples of Christian saintliness.

But when those principles have been ostentatiously proclaimed, when a peaceful neutral country which the other belligerent had promised to respect has been invaded and treated as Belgium has been treated, and when attempts are made to justify these deeds as incidental to a campaign for civilization and culture, it becomes necessary to point out how untrue and how pernicious such principles are.

What are the teachings of history, history to which General Bernhardi is fond of appealing? That war has been the constant handmaid of tyranny and the source of more than half the miseries of man. That although some wars have been necessary—wars of defense against aggression, or to succor the oppressed—most wars have been

needless or unjust. That the mark of an advancing civilization has been the substitution of friendship for hatred and of peaceful for warlike ideals. That small peoples have done and can do as much for the common good of humanity as large peoples. That Treaties must be observed, for what are they but records of national faith solemnly pledged, and what could bring mankind more surely and swiftly back to that reign of violence and terror from which it has been slowly rising for the last ten centuries than the destruction of trust in the plighted faith of nations?

No event has brought out that essential unity which now exists in the world so forcibly as this war has done, for no event has ever so affected every part of the world. Four continents are involved—the whole of the Old World—and the New World suffers grievously in its trade, industry, and finance. Thus the whole world is interested in preventing the recurrence of such a calamity; and there is a general feeling throughout the world that the causes which have brought it upon us must be removed.

We are told that armaments must be reduced, that the baleful spirit of militarism must be quenched, that the peoples must everywhere be admitted to a fuller share in the control of foreign policy, that efforts must be made to establish a sort of League of Concord—some system of international relations and reciprocal peace alliances by which the weaker nations may be protected, and under which differences between nations may be adjusted by courts of arbitration and conciliation of wider scope than those that now exist.

All these things are desirable. But no scheme for preventing future wars will have any chance of success unless

it rests upon the assurance that the States which enter into it will loyally and steadfastly abide by it, and that each and all of them will join in coercing by their overwhelming united strength any State which may disregard the obligations it has undertaken.

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